

*A constant Meditation upon DEATH, the best Security
against its Terrors.*

235.
A
S E R M O N

Preached at
L O N G - D I T T O N,
In the County of S U R R E Y,

A T T H E
F U N E R A L

Of the Reverend

J O S E P H C L A R K E, D. D.

Rector of the said Parish:

A P R I L the 11th, 1758. *✓*

By R I C H A R D W O O D D E S O N, M. A.
And Master of K I N G S T O N School.

*Publiſh'd at the Request of the Audience, particularly of the Clergy
then Present.*

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SEERMON

LONG-DITTON

In the County of SURRY



JOSEPH CLARKE D.D.

Rector of the said Parish:

Joseph Clarke

By RICHARD WOODBURN M.A.

And Master of the said School

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*When a few Years are come, then shall I go the
Way which I shall not return.*

THE Shortness and Uncertainty of human Life call upon us at all Times, and in all circumstances to keep up in our Minds a lively and constant sense of Duty, preparatory to that great change of Nature, which we all in our several *turns* must undergo. By *turns*—I cannot be supposed to mean a regular Succession according to Age and Condition, as this Day's Solemnity abundantly convinces us to the contrary. For tho' he himself, (whose venerable Remains lie before you) goes down to the Grave, being old and full of Days; yet he lived to see all the dearest Objects and Pledges of his Affection go before him, snatch'd away in the Morning or Noon of Life.

By Visitations of this sort, it pleases the good Providence of God sadly to bring home to ourselves the frailty of our Condition in this World; for altho' every Day's Experience furnishes us with new Scenes of Mortality, yet, as they are for the most part of such, as we are but slightly connected with, we are apt to give very little attendance to; tho' few of those Spectacles, but have as many to deplore the loss of them, as those within the Compass of our own Friends and Relations.

But when the Stroke is uplifted against ourselves, it is then high time to kiss *the Rod*, and *bim that hath appointed it*: to listen to the *Voice of bim that speaketh*; and to comply with the friendly Counsels he suggests unto us.

The loss of a Parent or Child we dearly love, is like the cutting asunder of Soul and Body,—is scarce to be conceived, till felt; and when felt, not to be expressed. But the loss of a spiritual Parent, has something still more infinitely awful in the Consideration, tho' less affecting perhaps, in regard to the workings of Nature and Humanity. For when a Pastor, who has *laboured long in the Word and Doctrine*, and *bore rule over you*, in your most important concerns, goes the way in which it was his chief care to direct others, it is natural *to cast an Eye towards the End of such a Conversation.*

It behoves you at such a Time with more than ordinary attention, to recollect the good Instructions, which you have so often heard from his Mouth, such which few Congregations were ever bless'd with; and to examine well what Improvement you have made under the divine Dispensations of Grace, through his Ministry; and this will extremely supply the defects of this Day's Exhortation; and your own Memories will be able to furnish you with Matter for it, where I fail.—*Being dead, he yet speaketh!* and more loudly and distinctly than ever he did in his Life! — His cold and silent Remains speak more affectingly, than all his Eloquence could enforce before, that *when a few Years are come, ye likewise must all go the way which ye shall not return.* On which Text there cannot be a fairer Comment than himself: For tho' he had past the Period, assign'd by the Psalmist, to human Life, *of Threescore Years and Ten*, and was now on the Verge of *Fourscore Years*, and that too with the peculiar Happiness of being free from that *Labour and Sorrow*, that Feebleness and Infirmary which are generally incident to that stage of Life; yet *they are soon past away and are gone!* — even the long Date of *Fourscore Years* so extensive in the human Imagination is soon past away and gone! — And the Wise and Good would, in regard to the Vanity and Nothingness of them, be glad to spare many in the Calculation, but for the Opportunity

tunity of sending before them a greater Number of *good Works*, for the Enlargement of their Reward and Increase of Glory.

From these Words therefore, and suitable to the present Occasion, give me leave to recommend to your Thoughts a serious Consideration of your latter End, and the Eternity which will succeed it, inasmuch when a few Years are come (at farthest, how much sooner God only knows) we must all go the Way we shall not return.

These Words the divine Writings recommend to our Meditation, in the Person and Character of holy *Job*: and infinite Comfort, no doubt, must it be to him, under his Calamities to consider, however galling the Burden of his present Affliction might be, that it could not last very long, — that a few rolling Years would close the Scene of his Life and Misfortunes together; and that every Hour brought them nearer to a Period, in that wish'd-for Retreat, where the *Wicked cease from troubling, and where the Weary are at rest*!

But however pleasing this Reflexion may be to him *whose Strength faileth, and is vexed in all things; to him who despaireth, and hath lost all Comfort*, yet according to the beautiful Expostulation of the wise Son of *Sirach*, *O Death! how bitter is the Remembrance of thee, who liveth at rest in his Possessions, unto the Man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath Prosperity in all things; yea, unto him, that is yet able to receive Meat*!

But however disagreeable be the Thought to People in such a Situation, yet it is at all Times necessary, as well in our Wealth, as in the Day of Trouble, to reflect upon our latter end, and by a constant and habitual Meditation upon it, so to reconcile it to our Thoughts, as not to be afraid with any amazement when the hour of our dissolution draweth nigh; but submit with resignation, to that indispensable condition of human Nature.

For

For Custom will soon make the Reflexion easy, and *Grace* will soften the rigour of that Sentence, which *Sin* and *Necessity* imposed; and if we would but let it have its due Influence upon us, it will not fail producing a constant Preparation suitable to so interesting a Catastrophe.

Now if a constant and habitual Meditation upon Death, will not only Prepare us for its approach, but even screen us from the Terrors of it; whence comes it to pass, that we are so industrious in stifling so useful a Consideration, upon which depends such desirable consequences, as to live in Comfort, and to die in Peace?

In endeavouring to account for so great and general an Infatuation,

I. I shall inquire into the Occasion and Grounds of Mens stifling the Thought of their Mortality. And proceed,

II. To shew the Advantages which will necessarily arise from a constant and serious Meditation upon Death, as they come recommended to our Minds by Motives of Reason and Religion.

And in regard to our first Inquiry; it is the Love that we bear to the Objects of Sense, which chiefly makes us averse to entertain any thoughts concerning our Mortality.

I need not say how exact a proportion the Objects of Sense bear to our Appetites: It is a Truth too well known to be insisted upon, that few are abstracted enough to relish any Pleasures of a different Turn, or to answer the nobler End of their Creation, in the Enjoyment of God, and the pursuit of intellectual Happiness. No; give the Blind sensual Wretch an uninterrupted swing in riot and wantonness, and he will not seem to feel the Absence of his real and substantial good; nor wish an Immortality of any other Happiness, than what he now enjoys.

Talk

o Talk to him of spiritual Life and Enjoyments, and he will be affected, as you may conceive a Man blind from his Birth would be, with a Description of fine Views and extensive Prospects, or as the deaf would be entertain'd, with the most harmonious and rapturous Music.

For as a Defect in any outward Organ of Sense disqualifies it from receiving any due Impression from its proper Objects so does a Habit of Sensuality destroy that power or faculty of the Soul, which forms a Proportion suitable to the Reception of the Object corresponding to its faculty.

o The Happiness of another State, is what we neither can hear or see, or perceive with our outward Senses. It must therefore require the severest Abstraction of the Soul, to pursue a Reflexion of something of which it can receive no manner of assistance, by any resemblance or hint in Nature. Other parts of Speculation have the Advantages of sensible Objects and Nature to assist them. For tho' it may be in the Power of the Imagination to form to itself an Idea of a Pile of Building, much more magnificent, than it is in the power of Art to execute; or to paint a Landscape with an assemblage of Beauties, nowhere to be found altogether in Nature, yet it still received some previous Hints, from what it before had heard or seen, or read of.

But spiritual Ideas, such as the Enjoyment of God, and the Happiness of another State, bear no manner of relation to any thing that we have heard or seen; they fly the Grasp of the Apprehension, and the most steady Pursuit of the Mind, and seem to be something that the Soul pants to enjoy, but is at a loss to find out the Manner, as well as the Measure of the Enjoyment.

It must be therefore with no small difficulty that such Ideas are impress'd upon the Mind, because of the disproportion they bear to our outward Senses; nor are they more easily retained, through the Importunity of outward Objects, which

which strike us in one inconceivable Succession, and are continually diverting the bent of our Thoughts another way. But we ought to be very earnest in our Endeavours to get the better of that unhappy Bias of our Wills and Appetites, because a too familiar and unreserved converse with outward Objects, will by insensible degrees, create an aversion to things that are only spiritually discern'd, and by a disuse of entertaining any Thoughts about them, will at last leave the Soul incapable of thinking of them any more, and in their stead make it to be forced to stoop to the Pleasures of Sense for an ill-grounded complacency; driven like the first Man out of Paradise, to seek his Happiness in a World of Misery and Woe.

And when a Man hath chose this World as his Portion, and confines his utmost Thoughts and Prospects here, it is no wonder if he startle at the Apprehension of leaving it, together with all he holds dear and desirable. To reflect that when a few Years (nay a few Days or Hours) are come, *he must go the Way whence he never shall return*; and that he must then enter upon a new, untry'd State of Existence is a painful Thought; but how much aggravated by the Reflexion, that he *shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth*; and that neither his Pleasures nor his Pomp shall follow him; that he is going where there is *no Eating or Drinking, no Marrying, or being given in Marriage*; no one Object to excite one sprightly Thought or gay Desire. It is not therefore difficult to be accounted for, why he is so industrious in stifling a Reflexion so destructive of his opinionative Happiness; especially when it is rendered still more insupportable by the Fears of something after Death.

While he is immers'd in the Cares and Pleasures of Life, while he is pursuing every Interest but his true one; it would be a perpetual Uneasiness and Restraint, to be met at every turn of Thought, that for all *these Things GOD will bring him to Judgment*.

This

This must necessarily afford him constant Matter of Interruption in his Pleasures, and Distraction in his Business. He therefore is obliged to shift with Artifice the Enemy he dare not face ; and though his ill-boding Suggestions often importune him to *meet his Enemy in the Way*, and make his Peace with him ; and though he is persuaded it would be his truest Interest so to do ; yet for the Present he is willing to check that his Bosom-monitor, *with Peace be still, what have I to do with thee, get thee behind me ;* or as Felix dismissed St. Paul, *When I have a more convenient Season I will send for thee*. Thus does he endeavour to silence the Clamours of Conscience here, that it may upbraid him hereafter, and divert the *Gnawing of the Worm*, which treacherously intermits for a little while, that it may gnaw for ever.

Thus, the *making Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof*, precludes all manner of Thought of a certain and necessary Evil, and makes Men risk the unutterable Miseries of another State, that they may smoothly *enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season*. This closes our Eyes, and stifles our Apprehensions, and even renders that restless Principle Curiosity unactive ; which, as it first prompted Man to his Ruin, so still does it push him upon every Inquiry but that which most nearly concerns him,—strange Infatuation ! that we should find Leisure to be busy in every one's Affairs but our own,—that we should be so intensely employed upon the most trivial Subjects of Speculation,—and yet cast not one Thought towards the Place whither we are going ; what we must be when we go hence, and must be forever !——

Which brings me to consider,

II. The great Advantages which will arise from a constant and habitual Meditation on our latter End, in order to recommend it as a reasonable and necessary Duty.

The Advantages of it must from hence appear infinitely great, as it will make our Life easy and comfortable, and our Death happy, and that by these three Methods,

1. By shewing us the Disproportion between this Life and Eternity.

2. By taking us off from sensual Objects, and

3. By disarming Death of his Terrors.

He who makes this Life his only Care, in his Imagination stretches it out as a Space of a long Duration, and according to his mistaken Idea of it, lays up a provisional Store for opinionative Happiness, equal to his hopes of length of Days; he views the Period of his Life, as through the wrong End of a Perspective, which represents the Object just before him, at almost an infinite Distance.

But he that is so wise *as to consider his latter End*, views Life under quite different Representations; he considers it, as no more than a Dream,— a Tale,— a Shadow,— we awake and the Dream vanisheth,— The Tale is told, and the Remembrance of it passeth away, — *The Shadow departeth and the Place thereof knoweth it no more!*

As soon as we were born we began to draw to our End,— not to the End of our Being; because *God created Man to be immortal, and to be the Image of his own Eternity*: But, I mean, to an End of this transitory State of Existence, assigned him in this World; betwixt which and Eternity, it surpasses the Stretch of human Thought to conceive the Disproportion. Time from its Birth to its latest Period, in respect to that Duration, is a Point,— is nothing,— like a Bubble upon a River it flows upon the Surface for a little while, then bursts, and mixes with the Stream for ever!

If I put the Question to a Man, whether for the sake of a Moment's exquisite Gratification, he would consent to be as exquisitely tortured for a Thousand Years; I doubt not, but he would think, I mistrusted his Understanding in proposing it; yet that Fool is he, and a far greater, who, to enjoy the transitory Pleasures of Sin, stakes his everlasting Happiness; for what is the longest Life in respect of that Duration? It is as the smallest Grain or Particle of Matter in respect to the Universe; tho' even here the Comparison falls infinitely short of affording a just Estimate of the Disproportion; for a Grain or Particle of Matter, however small it be, is still a Part of the Universe; but it is beyond the Power of Numbers to calculate, or Thought to conceive, the least Part of the Days of Eternity!

A Man who constantly reflects upon himself, as an eternally existent Being, cannot well be wanting in a Behaviour suitable to such a Character, especially when he thinks, that upon this alone depends his everlasting Happiness or Misery. It is impossible under such an influencing Motive, he could betray such a Carelessness and Indifference as the Generality of the World do, in a Matter of such infinite Importance; such a Consideration well weighed, and brought home to himself, would make him take heed to all his ways, (and as an ingenious Author observes) venture upon doing nothing now that he may be ashamed of, and sorry for a thousand Years hence. It must slacken his Affections to the Interests and vain Poms of this World; and if the Philosopher could despise all the Grandeur of this Life, in priding himself in the Title of a Citizen of this World; into how much a braver Contempt of it, will it influence him to consider, to think that he is the Heir of Immortality, and a Citizen of Heaven.—It must in short make him forego all the mean contracted Views of Life, for the nobler Employment of *doing good, and en-*

riching himself in good Works, (as the Apostle speaks) laying up in Store for himself a good Foundation, against the Time to come, that he may lay hold of eternal Life.

I come now in the Second Place to shew the Advantage an habitual Meditation upon Death, as it will take us off from sensual Objects.

It was a just Observation of a pious and learned Divine, that, "No Man can have Felicity in two States of Things, " if he take it in God, in God he shall have it hereafter; " for God will last for ever. But if he take his Felicity " in the Things of this World, where will be the Object " of his Happiness, when this World is at an End? so " that here, or hereafter, must be his Portion."

The Happiness of the Life to come is purely Intellectual, without any Mixture, that we now can conceive, of sensual Enjoyment: As therefore, upon leaving these, we hope to pass to Pleasures of a quite different Turn; it must make us extremely cautious of too intimately blending our Affections with the Things of this Life, considering our present Situation is a School, a State of Probation for the next World, and the Habits and Inclinations which we contract here will last us for ever. Particularly (as I observ'd before) that too close a Familiarity with sensual Objects, has a natural Tendency to subvert all manner of Relish for spiritual Enjoyment, insomuch that Heaven itself could not be Happiness to a worldly-minded Man.

For grant the Sensualist (as he fondly hopes) to be admitted into Heaven, what Enjoyment could he propose to himself there, *where there is no Eating or Drinking, no Marrying or being given in Marriage?* how could he be capable of the beatific Vision, and the Society of Angels, *without Holiness,* that one Qualification, *of seeing the Lord?* what Pleasure could it be to him, *to be singing Praises to him that sits upon the Throne, for ever and ever,*

in

in whose Heart there is no Gratitude, and in whose Mouth the Song of Praise is tasteless? or how shall a Soul untun'd with every discordant passion of Malice, Envy and Revenge, affect those Regions of Harmony and Love? the Consideration therefore, that we must ourselves form our own Qualifications for those Mansions of Bliss, must stir up in us an ardent Zeal of purifying ourselves, as God is pure; and make us extremely careful how we harbour any unruly Passion in our Breast, destructive of our present Hopes of future Happiness; *using this World as not abusing it, because the Fashion of this World passeth away.*

Lastly, a constant Meditation upon Death will disarm it of its Terrors.

This cannot be so properly called another, and a new Advantage arising from this Practice, as a Consequence and a Result from the other Two; for when we have Reflected long enough upon it, to beget in us a Sense of the Disproportion between this Life and Eternity, and an Indifference to sensual Objects, the Horrors of Death will insensibly vanish; because, (as I observ'd before) they are our Lusts and Passions, which dress him up in all his formidable Array, and paint him upon our Imagination the King of Terrors.

Had Death been really terrible, (said a wise Heathen) it had appeared so to *Socrates*; but *Socrates*, by the Light of Reason, had so practised himself in the Meditation upon the Vanity of all mortal Enjoyments, that the Continuance of them was to him Matter of Indifference; and a pleasing, tho' uncertain Expectation of Immortality, animated him with Joy and Transport, at the Approach of his Dissolution.

How far more transcendent Comfort must attend the dying Christian in his last Moments, *who knows in whom he has believed*; and is confident *that he is able to keep that*
which

which he has committed to him against that Day: that he is resigning his Soul into the Hands of a faithful Creator and Redeemer, in sure and certain Hopes of a Resurrection to everlasting Life.

And if a common Life of blameless Integrity, or a sincere Repentance will intitle a Man to this Comfort; what *a Crown of rejoicing* must be his Portion, who has laid up an uncommon *Treasure of good Works*; who besides a *Conscience void of offence towards GOD, and towards Men*, laboured more than fifty Years in his LORD's Vineyard; and who constantly during that Interval, preached twice every LORD's Day, with little or no Intermiſſion; not in the wild Rants of Enthusiasm, which serve to amuse, perplex or terrify, rather than to answer the proper Ends of Edification; much less (as the Manner of too many is) in the cold, lifeless Doctrines of Morality; but *rightly dividing the Word in Truth and Soberness?*

His Abilities as a Scholar and Divine, as well as every other personal Qualification, might have intitled him to the highest Stations in the Church, which, as his Learning might have done Honour to, his Wisdom and Prudence was extremely well calculated to conduct and manage.

This Circumstance however might have been omitted before this Audience, but as an Enhancement of his great Condescension; that whereas it had pleased GOD to place him in the Station of a private Clergyman, he notwithstanding, could level himself to the Business of his Calling, in stooping to the Directory of a plain Man's Duty, at the same Time that he was capable, as most Men living, to determine the most abstruse and controverted Points of Polemical Divinity.

Nor was his Judgment in that Ministry less conspicuous than his Humility; for avoiding scrupulous and perplexing Doubts; his main drift was to shew, that *denying their Ungodliness and Lusts, and living godly, honestly and soberly*

in this present World; with a thorough Persuasion, and Faith in the Satisfaction of CHRIST's Death and Passion, together with a ready Compliance with all his holy Ordinances, would infallibly secure the sincere Christian, *an inheritance among the Saints in Light*; and to discountenance the lazy Pretensions of an extraordinary Piety, to the Prejudice of an honest Industry; he taught them both by Precept and Example, that their next Duty which they ow'd to God, was that of minding their own Business in their several Callings and Employments; that they were serving God, while they were serving themselves and their Families, and might secure their Interests in both Worlds at the same Time. To which Purpose, as a good Friend, he was as hearty in promoting their temporal Concerns, as the pious Pastor was warm and affectionate in promoting their eternal Welfare; to which friendly Offices he was more than commonly qualified by an excellent Judgment and Sagacity, and a thorough Acquaintance with the whole Oeconomy of human Life; so that I dare appeal to most of you here present, for a Testimony of that uninterrupted friendly Intercourse that subsisted between you, during the long Course of his Ministry, on his Part — all the good Offices of a good Pastor and kind Neighbour — and on your Part, a grateful Sense of them, in a due Return of Respect and Observance.

His natural Habit of Cheerfulness and Benevolence inclined him to be affable and courteous to all Men; without the least Mixture of mean and servile Compliances, for he no more courted the Smiles, than he dreaded the Threatnings of Man, *whose Breath is in his Nostrils*. He, in some measure, imitated the Character of the Baptist, in constantly speaking the Truth, and in boldly rebuking Vice; and to which I might venture to add the third Particular, of that of suffering patiently for the Truth's sake; had he been called thereunto by divine Providence; the necessary
Virtues

Virtues to which Purpose few Men ever had in a more eminent Degree, namely those of personal Courage and Bravery, of Patience and Resignation, Instances of which I persuade myself need no mentioning before this Assembly: — you are all Witnesses to them.

But however there is one, I cannot altogether pass by in silence; and that is his amazing Fortitude of Behaviour upon the Loss of an only Son—one, that had every Accomplishment to command Respect, every amiable Virtue to endear Friendship! — a Loss that might have brought down a Patriarch, and *his grey Hairs with Sorrow to the Grave.* — A Loss which nothing could have supported him under but the Consciousness of the Integrity of his own Heart, — and a Sense of Duty, to cry out with old *Eli* — *It is the LORD!* — and instead of sinking under the Pressure of so fore a Calamity, to the Abatement of his active Powers, he was rather animated thereby to exert them in the Interests of the Orphans he left behind him through all the Intricacies of a perplex'd Administration, which could scarce have been effected by any Address less singular, or an Industry less indefatigable than his own — Time would fail me to enter into farther Particulars concerning this valuable Man, — therefore to sum up the Whole, when we shall enquire after a Person conscientious in the Discharge of his Duty, — Honest in his Intentions, — Upright in his Dealings, — and irreproachable in Word and Deed, we shall not find a fairer Transcript of One than in the Character and Memory of Dr. CLARKE!

As I have already too long trespassed upon your Patience, I shall be as brief as possible in the Application. — And to begin with the Object before us, let us live the *Life of the Righteous, that our last End may be like his*; for these are the best and only preparatory Means of disarming Death of his Terrors. And then how transporting will

will be the Thought, that we are at Peace with the great Enemy of human Nature, and that it is out of his Power to hurt us, and that we have got rid of that gloomy Suspense and Anxiety which were wont to sit heavy on the Heart, a Leven in our Pleasures, and a Canker in every Enjoyment; which through fear of Death exposed us all our Life long to the most insupportable Bondage.

But how easy is every Condition of Life to him who is not afraid of leaving it! Is his Lot one continued Series of Calamities? does he *now go on his Way weeping*, and find none to pity him? He knows to retire within himself, for his own Comfort, in this pleasing Reflection, that he shall soon pass from this Seat of Sorrow to those Realms of Bliss, *where Tears shall be for ever wip'd away from his Eyes!*—But on the other hand is he at ease in his Dwelling? not to be afraid of the Terrors of Death, will infinitely improve his Felicity. This will give him a serenity of Soul, a constant habit of Cheerfulness, such as the World and all its Poms and Allurements cannot give. *He will rise from his Place with Joy*, when his Heart trembles not within him under the Apprehension of any approaching Danger: for he that has secur'd an Interest in another World, is very little anxious about this, and turns every Accident, every Loss, and even Death itself to his Advantage. “What tho’ (says he) *I am cut off in the midst of my Days, from the Land of the Living; I could have indeed liv'd longer to my own Satisfaction, and the Comfort of my Friends, but to die and to be with Christ, is still far better.*”

When the Business of the Day is over, He lays himself down in Peace, and composes himself to Rest, in sure and certain Confidence of the Divine Favour, not at all solicitous about the Perils of the Night, indifferent in his Choice to sleep, or die!

What Degree of Madness is it then to stifle the Thought, upon which alone can be built our Comfort here, and

Happiness hereafter?— if indeed by quieting our Apprehensions of Death, we could remove him to a greater Distance, and by suspending our Thoughts, suspend our Fate; this might indeed justify our not entertaining so disagreeable a Reflection; but since whether we think of it or no, this necessary End will come in its appointed Time; it much better becomes our Prudence, to provide against an Evil we cannot avoid,—to weigh in the Balance the vain Enjoyments of this transitory Life—and to remember the days of Darkneſs, for they are many.

FINIS.



